

OUR COMMON FUTURE IN URBAN MORPHOLOGY (Vol 1)

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*Editors*

VITOR OLIVEIRA

PAULO PINHO

LUISA MENDES BATISTA

TIAGO PATATAS



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# **Towards a flexible definition of limits in urban planning: controlling urban form under uncertainty**

**Bruno Moreira**

Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura e Urbanismo, Faculdade de Arquitectura da  
Universidade do Porto. E-mail: bmoreira@arq.up.pt

The Portuguese formal planning system was born in the 1930s along with a dictatorship more concerned with individual interests than with collective progress, promoting the development of an opaque, centralized, hierarchical and ineffective planning system. In the 1970s democracy was restored and modern concepts of planning began to be applied, yet still limited to consolidated urban areas and their surroundings. The reality was that the territory beyond those limits was growing with little to no control, pushed by industrialization, increased mobility and people's expectations towards better work and life conditions. When the first plans that considered the municipality as a whole were born in 1982, and the strategy towards a more strategic planning approach gained momentum in the 1990s, the territory was already faced with disorder and conflicts. Plans and regulations created to *limit* and *control* the individual's increased capability to transform the territory took part on a reactive and prohibitive system instead of on one based on pro-activity and responsibility: the inflexible nature of these plans led to delays in their definition and approval as a response to uncertainty, when other countries were making regulations more flexible (Portas, N., 1995). The concept and expressions of *limits* are structural and deeply embedded in plans and regulations, as they influence and control urban form, which is gaining significant relevance within urban planning since the 1980s (Oliveira, V., 2006). Our goal, as part of a research focused on the flexibility of planning instruments and their efficacy on regulating contemporary urban space, is to identify how these limits have been defined and represented in key moments of the urban planning theory and expressed in their plans and regulations. We will pay a special interest to the municipality of Santo Tirso, showing how a flexible definition of limits can lead to a more efficient planning system, more adjusted to the uncertainty of our contemporary territory.

Key Words: flexibility, limits, municipal planning, uncertainty, urban form.

## References:

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